Numb. DXXIII.

The SPECTATOR.

———nunc augur Apollo,
Nunc Lyciæ ſortes, nunc & Jove miſſus ab ipſo
Interpres Divûm fert horrida juſſa per auras.
Scilicet is ſuperis labor——— Virg.

Thurſday, October 30. 1712.

I Am always highly delighted with the Diſcovery of any riſing Genius among my Country-men. For this Reaſon I have read over, with great Pleaſure, the late Miſcellany publiſhed by Mr. Pope, in which there are many Excellent Compoſitions of that Ingenious Gentleman. I have had a Pleaſure of the ſame kind, in peruſing a Poem that is juſt publiſhed on *the Proſpect of Peace*, and which, I hope, will meet with ſuch a Reward from its Patrons, as ſo noble a Performance deſerves. I was particularly well pleaſed to find that the Author had not amuſed himſelf with Fables out of the Pagan Theology, and that when he hints at any thing of that nature, he alludes to it only as to a Fable.

Many of our Modern Authors, whoſe Learning very often extends no farther than *Ovid's Metamorphoſis*, do not know how to celebrate a Great Man, without mixing a parcel of School-boy Tales with the Recital of his Actions. If you read a Poem on a fine Woman, among the Authors of this Claſs, you ſhall ſee that it turns more upon *Venus* or *Helen*, than on the Party concerned. I have known a Copy of Verſes on a great Hero highly commended, but upon asking to hear ſome of the beautiful Paſſages, the Admirer of it has repeated to me a Speech of *Apollo*, or a Deſcription of *Polypheme*. At other times when I have ſearched for the Actions of a Great Man, who gave a Subject to the Writer, I have been entertained with the Exploits of a River-God, or have been forced to attend a Fury in her miſchievous Progreſs, from one end of the Poem to the other. When we are at School it is neceſſary for us to be acquainted with the Syſtem of Pagan Theology, and may be allowed to enliven a Theme, or point an Epigram with an Heathen God; but when we would write a manly Panegyrick, that ſhould carry in it all the Colours of Truth, nothing can be more ridiculous than to have recourſe to our *Jupiter's* and *Juno's*.

No Thought is beautiful which is not juſt, and no Thought can be juſt which is not founded in Truth, or at leaſt in that which paſſes for ſuch.

In Mock-Heroick Poems, the uſe of the Heathen Mythology is not only excuſable but graceful, becauſe it is the Deſign of ſuch Compoſitions to divert, by adapting the fabulous Machines of the Ancients to low Subjects, and at the ſame time by ridiculing ſuch kinds of Machinery in Modern Writers. If any are of Opinion, that there is a neceſſity of admitting theſe Claſſical Legends into our Serious Compoſitions, in order to give them a more Poetical Turn; I would recommend to their Conſideration the Paſtorals of Mr. *Philips*. One would have thought it impoſſible for this Kind of Poetry to have ſubſiſted without Fawns and Satyrs, Wood-Nymphs and Water-Nymphs, with all the Tribe of Rural Deities. But we ſee he has given a new Life, and a more natural Beauty to this way of Writing, by Subſtituting in the Place of theſe Antiquated Fables, the ſuperſtitious Mythology which prevails among the Shepherds of our own Country.

Virgil and *Homer* might compliment their Heroes, by interweaving the Actions of Deities with their Achievements; but for a Chriſtian Author to write in the Pagan Creed, to make Prince *Eugene* a Favourite of *Mars*, or to carry on a Correſpondence

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decide between *Bellona* and the Marſhal *De Villars*, would be downright Puerility, and unpardonable in a Poet that is paſt Sixteen. It is want of ſufficient Elevation in a Genius to deſcribe Realities, and place them in a ſhining Light, that makes him have recourſe to ſuch trifling antiquated Fables; as a Man may write a fine Deſcription of *Bacchus* or *Apollo*, that does not know how to draw the Character of any of his Contemporaries.

In order, therefore, to put a ſtop to this abſurd Practice, I ſhall publiſh the following Edict, by Vertue of that Spectatorial Authority with which I ſtand Inveſted.

'WHEREAS the Time of a General Peace 'is, in all appearance, drawing near; being 'informed that there are ſeveral ingenious Per'ſons who intend to ſhew their Talents on ſo 'happy an Occaſion, and being willing, as much 'as in me lies, to prevent that Effuſion of Non'ſenſe, which we have good Cauſe to apprehend; 'I do hereby ſtrictly require every Perſon, who 'ſhall write on this Subject, to remember that 'he is a Chriſtian, and not to Sacrifice his Ca'techiſm to his Poetry. In order to it, I do 'expect of him in the firſt place, to make his 'own Poem without depending upon *Phœbus* for 'any part of it, or calling out for Aid upon any 'one of the Muſes by Name. I do likewiſe po'ſitively forbid the ſending of *Mercury* with any 'particular Meſſage or Diſpatch relating to the 'Peace, and ſhall by no means ſuffer *Minerva* to take 'upon her the Shape of any Plenipotentiary con'cerned in this Great Work. I do further de'clare, that I ſhall not allow the Deſtinies to have 'had an Hand in the Deaths of the ſeveral Thou'ſands who have been ſlain in the late War, be'ing of Opinion that all ſuch Deaths may be very 'well accounted for by the Chriſtian Syſtem of 'Powder and Ball. I do therefore ſtrictly for'bid the Fates to cut the Thread of Man's Life 'upon any Pretence whatſoever, unleſs it be for 'the ſake of the Rhime. And whereas I have 'good Reaſon to fear that *Neptune* will have a 'great deal of Buſineſs on his Hands, in ſeveral 'Poems which we may now ſuppoſe are upon the 'Anvil, I do alſo prohibit his Appearance, unleſs 'it be done in Metaphor, Simile, or any very ſhort 'Alluſion, and that even here he be not permitted 'to enter, but with great Caution and Circum'ſpection. I deſire that the ſame Rule may be ex'tended to his whole Fraternity of Heathen Gods, 'it being my Deſign to condemn every Poem to 'the Flames, in which *Jupiter* Thunders, or ex'erciſes any other Act of Authority which does 'not belong to him: In ſhort, I expect that no Pa'gan Agent ſhall be introduced, or any Fact re'lated which a Man cannot give Credit to with a 'good Conſcience. Provided always, that nothing 'herein contained ſhall extend, or be conſtrued 'to extend, to ſeveral of the Female Poets in this 'Nation, who ſhall be ſtill left in full Poſſeſſion 'of their Gods and Goddeſſes, in the ſame man'ner as if this Paper had never been written.

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